

# Georgia Chamber, Largest Companies Fund Smear Campaigns to Oust Populist Legislators

## May 21, 2016

### The Funding:

In the 2014 primaries, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and **Georgia's largest companies funded vicious smear campaigns to remove populist legislators** who were elected by the grass roots efforts of Georgia citizens. The campaigns were [led](#) by \$95,000 from the chamber and its political action committee (PAC) and [fueled](#) by \$50,000 contributions from giant Georgia companies such as Coca Cola, Delta Airlines, Georgia Power, SunTrust and AT&T.

In some cases, funds were collected from **unsuspecting employees** who believed that they were contributing to support company friendly legislation or "good government" advocacy. Instead, the money was used to run deceptively untruthful campaigns that resulted in the **removal** of two of the more independent minded representatives in the Georgia State House.

The corporate funds were given to an organization called the [Georgia Coalition for Job Creation](#), (GCJC). The coalition address is a post office box at a downtown Atlanta hotel. The GCJC is [headed by](#) Chief Executive Officer Shawn Still. Still is a member of the Board of Directors for the Chamber of Commerce and owner of Olympic Pool Plastering. Public records show Robert F. Hatcher Jr. as Treasurer / Secretary and Anne Lewis as the Registered Agent. Mr. Hatcher is a Director at Mid Country Financial of Macon and Ms. Lewis is an attorney who also serves as General Counsel for the Georgia Republican Party. The coalition web site defines its [purpose](#):

*"The Georgia Coalition for Job Creation is an independent committee that seeks to elect leaders who have demonstrated a willingness to fight to grow jobs and expand economic opportunity for all Georgians."*

### The Smear Campaigns:

Instead of using the funds to further job creation, **the coalition targeted selected legislators or candidates using extensive, slanderous attacks**. One of many examples is Sen. Michael Williams. Williams was a candidate running against former Sen. Jack Murphy, who had support from flyers mailed by the coalition. Sen. Williams actually created jobs by opening a successful restaurant in Forsyth County. However, he was [targeted](#) by a mailer with an unproven claim that he abused his former wife. Before he entered the race, Williams received a [threatening package](#) that attempted to blackmail him with that same allegation. The coalition keyed on that unproven allegation and even went so far as to create a "*Michael Gone Wild*" web site. The allegation and web site are especially dubious since Sen. Williams has proven to be one of the mildest mannered, most rationale and compassionate members of the entire state legislature. Even if it was true, the mailer and web site had **nothing to do with job creation** and they run **counter** to the coalition's stated purpose.

But the **top two targets** of the coalition were sitting House members: Rep. Charles Gregory and Rep. Sam Moore. Comprehensive campaigns against them included [viciously false postal mailers](#), negative social media pages or web sites advocating that the legislators be fired and

supporting mailers for their political opponents. Gregory, former state director for the 2012 Ron Paul presidential campaign, won his House District 34 seat in Kennesaw using a grass roots funded, door to door campaign. Gregory consistently fought against excessive spending, supported reduced regulations, and opposed tax increases. These are all considered to be **pro job growth positions**. Nevertheless, the coalition accused him of supporting Obamacare although he actually voted once to nullify it. The coalition also criticized his opposition to drug tests for food stamp recipients and a variety of other things that are **not** related to job creation.

### **The Big Lie:**

But the **most vicious coalition attacks** were reserved for Rep. Sam Moore, Rep. Moore won a special election to replace Calvin Hill who died while in office. He won that Cherokee County House District 22 seat with a grass roots funded door to door campaign. Rep. Moore did **not** take campaign contributions from corporations, PACs, lobbyists or legislators and could not be controlled by them.

Shortly after taking office Moore introduced a **bill to remove loitering laws that have been consistently ruled unconstitutional and caused localities to pay millions of dollars in damages**. The coalition seized that opportunity to create a Fire Sam Moore social media [page](#) and web site and send [flyers](#) to his constituents claiming that the reduction in loitering laws would allow sexual predators in schools. The claim had a problem: **It was a lie and it still is:**

- Loitering laws only apply at unusual times when children would not normally be present [O.C.G.A. 16-11-36:](#)
- Non parental access to children at school is prevented by the Children Protection Act [O.C.G.A. 21-2-1180:](#)
- Children are further protected by State Sex Offender Registry Laws [O.C.G.A. 42-1-15:](#)
- Known predators are also required to wear an electronic monitoring device [O.C.G.A. 42-1-14.](#)

**The lie was created** and propagated on February 21, 2014 under the supervision of House Speaker David Ralston who manages the floor proceedings. On that day, a small handful of **fellow Republican legislators** took to the well of the floor in a highly unusual, orchestrated maneuver to criticize Moore's just introduced bill, [HB1033](#). That, in itself, was remarkable considering that many legislators don't even read and understand their own bills during the entire bill life cycle. Yet they supposedly analyzed the bill of another legislator before it was even assigned to a committee.

The Republican legislators, most of who were on the House leadership team, had a motive. **They had already flooded Moore's previous opponent, Megan Biello, with \$17,000 in contributions** during the special election. That was when Moore defeated her in a February 4 Republican primary run-off. Biello continued to run for the seat that Moore won and would face him again in the upcoming primary. Her campaign raised \$30,000 in total with over 97% of the money coming from out of district sources. She benefitted significantly from the negative publicity Ralston's House leadership supporters generated against Rep. Moore as well as coalition [mailers](#) sent by the coalition on her behalf. Biello had no track record indicating that she would *"fight to grow jobs and expand economic opportunity for all Georgians."*

### **The Victims:**

Selectively funding one Republican primary campaign over another is nothing new for Ralston's House leadership team. In a 2012 District 46 primary, legislators gave over \$27,000 including **\$5,000 from the Speaker to ensure the defeat of a minister**, Rev. Martin Hawley. Hawley was running for the seat of Rep. Bobby Franklin a healthy, independent minded, 54 year-old who was found dead in his Cobb County home on July 26, 2011. Rev. Hawley, one of Franklin's pastors, raised 96% of his \$11,000 in campaign funds from individuals. John Carson, the candidate supported by Ralston and his House leadership team raised about 93% of his \$54,000+ from legislators, PACs, lobbyists and corporations. His overwhelming **5:1 spending advantage** resulted in a 2:1 margin of victory in that Republican primary.

Michael Williams survived the onslaught with some help from talk radio show host Erick Erickson. He upset Sen. Jack Murphy in his primary and became a state senator. Gregory and Moore were not as fortunate. Rep. Charles Gregory lost a close 52%-48% primary to Bert Reeves. Reeves used the same lies in his flyers that the coalition used against Gregory. The coalition had even claimed that Gregory supported sexual predators in schools even though HB1033 never had a hearing or a vote.

Rep. Sam Moore lost by about 2% in a close three way race with Biello and Wes Cantrell, garnering close to 30% of the vote in a May 2014 Republican primary. Biello lost the run-off to Cantrell in July. Both Biello and Cantrell repeatedly used the lie to attack Moore. **Since voters are not familiar with Georgia law**, the truth didn't matter and the lie worked. The candidates and the coalition had repeated the lie often enough until it became the truth.

**Speaker Ralston had to know** that allegations regarding Rep. Moore's bill were false since he is a criminal defense lawyer. Nevertheless, he facilitated creation of the controversy. Civic leaders became outraged over the orchestrated attack on Moore, Ralston's tampering with primary election funding and the dictatorial way in which he runs the House runs in defiance of democratic principles. Those leaders, including some from the speaker's own party called for his **resignation** at an April 29, 2014 [press conference](#) in the Georgia Capitol. However, Ralston continued unopposed as Speaker of the House and retained his seat against primary challenger, Coach Sam Snider.

### **Connecting some Dots:**

The Gregory-Reeves race provides us further insight into the depth of corruption in and around the Georgia state government. Reeves had rented an apartment in District 34 a week before qualifying and then immediately filed to run for Charles Gregory's seat. Reeves worked as lawyer in the offices of [GMHC360](#) LLC. Records show that he and one or more of his campaign staff members were located at 57 Waddell St. in Marietta.

During that time the offices of GMHC360 were located at the 57 Waddell St. address. Heath Garrett is a founding partner of GMHC360. Garrett leased the top floor of the small two story building from Cobb County which previously used it as a property management office. Garrett was chief of staff for U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson. He also served as lead political strategist for the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and their SPLOST efforts.

OF course, the Georgia Coalition for Job Creation did not really operate out of a hotel post office box as its mailers imply. Substantial evidence including photos, financial filings, social media postings, news reports and other records show that employees and sub-contractors of the coalition worked in the very same floor and office building at 57 Waddell St. then.

If you think this all sounds like a conflict of interest you likely would be right. The coalition was conducting attack campaigns against candidates and supporting ads for the opposing candidates. At the same time it operated from the very floor and office building that housed a candidate they were supporting and one or more of the campaign staff members.

Although this arrangement has pretty clear ethics violations, the coalition had little to worry about. In 2011, Gov. Nathan Deal appointed Heath Garrett to the **State Ethics Commission** when Executive Director Stacey Kalberman was demoted, her top deputy fired and two other employees pressured to conceal evidence. Kalberman's Ethics Commission was conducting an investigation of Gov. Deal's campaign finance activities. The commission eventually shelled out roughly **\$3 million** in taxpayer funds to those four top former employees who filed different types of **wrongful termination lawsuits**.

#### **Conclusion:**

The memory of the 2014 Republican primaries serves as a graphic example of how corporate elitists and establishment politicians control Georgia state elections and Georgia legislators. The examples cited are only three of a dozen cases where the GCJC tampered with Georgia elections. In these cases, the deception and lies shown above were used by the GCJC to assert false or deceptive claims against candidates in a manner inconsistent with their stated purpose.

The coalition has already struck again this year with the same method of operation against different legislators or candidates. The coalition has been [sustained](#) during this election cycle by **\$150,000 from Georgia Power** alone and another \$40,000 from AT&T. The GCJC is prepared to continue striking and capable of subverting the will of Georgia voters anywhere in the state.

The Georgia Coalition for Job Creation is a vivid illustration of why Georgia ranks as America's [most politically corrupt state](#) according to the Center for Public Integrity. The state received an **"F"** in Political Financing, Legislative Accountability and Ethics Enforcement Agencies, which was given a **"O"**. It will take a mass effort from citizens, corporate management, news media and legislators to turn things around. Establishment politicians allow this type of corruption to continue in Georgia because they benefit from it.

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